

## What Is ...

### Habeas Corpus

A Latin term that means, "You should have the body"

Habeas corpus means that a person who is put in prison has the right to a trial in a court. Habeas corpus was part of the Magna Carta (one of the most important legal documents in history) created in the year 1215. Habeas corpus is part of the U.S. Constitution.



### The Geneva Conventions

Four treaties first signed in 1949 that set guidelines for the humane treatment of prisoners of war

The Geneva Conventions are signed by 194 countries, including the United States. The guidelines say that prisoners should be treated humanely.

The Bush administration says that it does not have to follow the Geneva Conventions with prisoners suspected of being al-Qaeda members because they are not in uniform and do not represent a government. President Bush says that they are "unlawful combatants" and are not covered by the Geneva Conventions.

### What You Can Do

- Read the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights at [www.un.org/overview/rights.html](http://www.un.org/overview/rights.html). Tell others about their rights and know yours!
- Join an organization that works for human rights.
- Start a human rights organization at your school. Hold an event around Human Rights Day, December 10. Show a film (such as the PBS Frontline documentary that can be viewed at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/torture/view/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/torture/view/)) or invite a speaker from a human rights organization.
- Create a drawing, skit, song, video, poem or essay about human rights or about one of the 30 human rights in the declaration.
- Let people know how you feel about the bullying and mistreatment of others in your community, your country or the world. Speak out at community events or public meetings, attend protests against torture, war and occupation, write letters for publication in your local newspaper and IndyKids or send letters to your elected representatives.

**"ONE OF THE GUARDS TOLD ME, 'WHEN WE SEE YOU PEOPLE, WE CAN'T LOOK AT YOU AS HUMAN BEINGS. IT'S EASY FOR US TO DEHUMANIZE YOU. FIRST OF ALL, YOU GUYS DON'T EVEN SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE. SECONDLY, YOU LOOK DIFFERENT. THIRDLY, YOU'RE IN CAGES AND WE'RE OUT HERE WITH THE GUNS.' "**

— Moazzam Begg, Amnesty International Conference, 11/19/05

DECEMBER 10 • INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

# Protect Our Rights!

December 10 marks the anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948.

Every person on Earth is entitled to the same rights. However, sometimes when people don't know their rights or when they're not paying attention, they are mistreated. A new law passed in October raises questions about the U.S. government's human rights record.

Stories By AMANDA VENDER

### MILITARY COMMISSIONS

## President Gets Power to Approve Torture, Prison Without Trial

On October 17 President Bush signed a new law called the Military Commissions Act. The law allows the government to put people who are not U.S. citizens in prison without a court hearing.

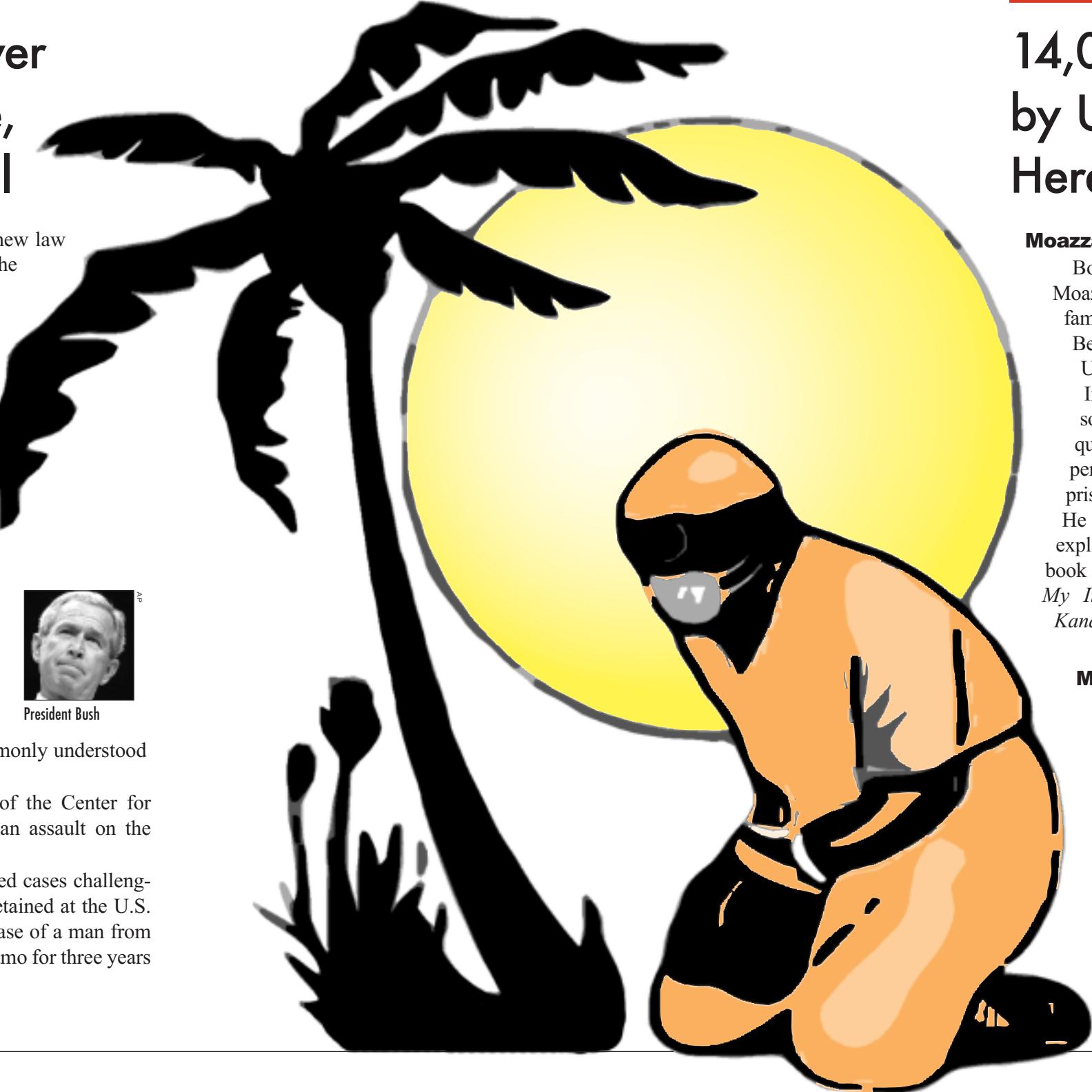
There are now more than 500 people held in U.S. government prisons who have filed habeas cases (see box on habeas corpus, upper left). Until now a prisoner held in a U.S. prison could file for habeas corpus if he or she was being imprisoned before a court hearing determined guilt or innocence. But the passing of the new law means that the government can continue to hold someone in prison without a trial.

The new law also expands the president's powers and allows him to determine what is considered torture.

With the law in effect, the government can carry out certain treatments that are commonly understood to be torture.

Vincent Warren, the executive director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, called the new law "an assault on the Constitution."

Mr. Warren's organization has already filed cases challenging imprisonment without trial for 25 men detained at the U.S. Bagram Air Force Base in Iraq, and for the case of a man from Baltimore who has been in prison in Guantanamo for three years without trial.



### DETAINEES OF WAR

## 14,000 Detained by U.S. Military: Here are Two Stories

### Moazzam Begg

Born and raised in England, Moazzam Begg was taken from a family home in Pakistan in 2002. Begg was held for three years in U.S. prisons in Guantanamo, Iraq and Afghanistan. Begg spent two years in solitary confinement (in a room by himself), was questioned on three hundred occasions for long periods of time and saw two detainees killed by prison guards. He was never charged with a crime. He was released from prison in 2005 without any explanation or apology. Begg recently published a book about his experiences called *Enemy Combatant: My Imprisonment at Guantanamo, Bagram and Kandahar*.



### Maher Arar

A Canadian citizen, Maher Arar was detained by U.S. officials in 2002 as he was returning to Canada from a vacation. The U.S. falsely accused Arar of links to terrorism and sent him to Syria, where he was born. In Syria he was beaten and tortured and held for a year. In September 2006 the Canadian government cleared Arar of the accusations against him. In October he was given the International Human Rights Award by the Institute for Policy Studies.



**Guantanamo Bay Prison**  
A military prison on the U.S. naval base in Cuba

Since 2002 the Bush government has held people that it believes may be members of al-Qaeda or the Taliban. The U.S. government calls these terrorist organizations. Prisoners from 42 countries have been held at Guantanamo, some of them children under age 16. There are 450 men being held in the prison. The military says that many of the people held there are innocent.

Several prisoners who have been released from Guantanamo report that they were tortured. The Commission on Human Rights at the United Nations, which investigates torture around the world, was scheduled to investigate the situation at Guantanamo in December 2005. But the investigation did not take place because the U.S. government refused to allow the Commission to interview the prisoners.



### What's going on inside the prison walls?

- Prisoners kept awake for long periods of time
- Prisoners put in extremely hot or cold temperatures
- Prisoners forced to be naked
- Waterboarding (a technique where a prisoner is lowered into water and made to feel that he is drowning)
- Prisoners given electric shocks
- Prisoners hung by their hands for long periods of time

The U.S. government is believed to be carrying out these techniques in prisons in Guantanamo Bay, Afghanistan, Iraq and possibly other places. The Bush government says these measures are necessary to get suspected criminals to give more information about possible crimes. What do you think? E-mail us at [indykids@indymedia.org](mailto:indykids@indymedia.org)